

Foreword

by Brian Zahnd

What is God like? What an enormous question. For those of us who believe that God is somehow at the foundation of existence, meaning and self-understanding, it's an all-important question. So how shall we answer? Our options are endless. Human inquiry into the divine has produced a vast pantheon of gods—from Ares to Zeus. Of course, the Christian will instinctively look to the Bible for the definition of God. I understand this instinct and in one sense it is correct; but it may not yield as clear an answer as we think. Even while speaking of the 'God of the Bible' we can cobble together whatever vision of God we choose from its disparate images. That we do this mostly unconsciously doesn't help matters.

Even if we restrict our inquiry into the nature of God to the Bible, we are likely to find just the kind of God that we want to find. If we want a God of peace, he's there. If we want a God of war, he's there. If we want a compassionate God, he's there. If we want a vindictive God, he's there. If we want an egalitarian God, he's there. If we want an ethnocentric God, he's there. If we want a God demanding blood sacrifice, he's there. If we want a God abolishing blood sacrifice, he's there. Sometimes the Bible is like a Rorschach test—it reveals more about the reader than the eternal I AM.

What are we to do? How are we to discover God as God is? As a Christian, pastor and preacher, I would like to recommend we look to Jesus for our answer to the question. Or let me say it this way: What if God is like Jesus? What if the personality of God is identical to the personality of the man called Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in the Gospels? Jesus audaciously made this claim: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." What if that claim is true? Wouldn't that be good news? Ah, that *is* the good news! God *is* like Jesus!

This is Christianity, which is not to be confused with ‘biblicism.’ As Christians we worship Christ, not the Bible. The Bible is the inspired witness to the true Word of God who is Jesus. What the Bible does infallibly is take us on a journey that culminates with Christ—but it is Christ who fully reveals God. Or we can say it this way: The Scriptures ultimately bear witness to Christ, and Christ perfectly bears witness to God. While we are searching the Bible to find out what God is like, the Bible is all the while resolutely pointing us to Jesus. The revelation of God could not be contained in a book, but it could be contained in a human life—the life of Jesus Christ.

God is like Jesus. Jesus is the Message of God. Jesus is what God has to say. Jesus is the full and faithful witness to how God is to be understood. Jesus didn’t come to save us from God (as some deplorable theories would lead us to believe)—Jesus came to reveal God as Savior. Jesus didn’t come to enable God to love us—Jesus came to reveal God as love. Jesus didn’t come to reconcile God to the world—Jesus came to reconcile the world to God. If Jesus’ life is the definition of God, the defining moment of Jesus’ life is the Cross. As John Cihak observed, “being disguised under the disfigurement of an ugly crucifixion and death, the Christform upon the Cross is the clearest revelation of who God is.” As an evangelist I can do no better work than to point to Jesus on the Cross and say, “Right there! *That* is what God is like.” God is not like Caiaphas needing a scapegoat to take the blame. God is not like Pilate requiring an execution to satisfy justice. God is like Jesus, absorbing, forgiving and taking away the sins of the world.

A return to the revelation that God is revealed in Christ could not be more timely. Western Christianity is in a crisis. It can no longer retain credibility and be transmitted to succeeding generations on the authority of tradition alone. Critical questions are being asked and Christianity must gain its adherents based on its own merits. Fortunately Christianity is up to the task. But not just

any Christianity; the Christianity up to the task is the Christianity grounded in the confession that Jesus is the icon of the invisible God. I am in full sympathy with those who find “Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God” Christianity repellent and in need of being jettisoned. I too have pitched the theologies of an angry, retributive deity back into the dark sea of paganism. The good news is that buried under centuries of misconstrued Christianity there is a beautiful gospel just waiting to be discovered.

Brad Jersak knows this good news. In *A More Christlike God* Brad is a wise and patient guide, walking us toward the beautiful gospel while never shirking the hard questions. With the keen mind of a theologian and the tender heart of a pastor, Brad converses with seekers who want to believe in a more Christlike God, but don't want to arrive there by cheap clichés or wishful thinking. Brad Jersak is no purveyor of pop Christianity. He has done the hard work of real theology. He has gone down into the Patristic mines and brought back gold. He has become conversant with our best contemporary theologians and made their work accessible. He has struggled with his own dark night of the soul and comes to us holding a lantern. I am happy to have Brad Jersak as a guide. He knows the way beyond the ugly parodies of Christianity into the beautiful gospel of a Christlike God. Let the journey begin.

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